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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 000636

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/01/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [FR](#) [EUN](#) [UNO](#) [GG](#) [UNMIK](#) [YI](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: GEORGIA/ABKHAZIA WITH DAS BRYZA; FRENCH FAVOR  
PRUDENCE PENDING KOSOVO STATUS SETTLEMENT

REF: A. STATE 18053  
[1](#)B. PARIS 363  
[1](#)C. 06 PARIS 7057

Classified By: PolMC Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 (B & D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a February 14 meeting with EUR DAS Bryza, MFA A/S-equivalent for Eastern Europe and Central Asia Terral argued for keeping Georgia/Abkhazia on the back burner for the time being to avoid provoking the Russians on Kosovo; Terral was particularly keen on the smoothest possible renewal of the UNOMIG mandate in advance of UNSC discussions on Ahtisaari's Kosovo package. Bryza agreed on the desirability of lowering the temperature on the Caucasus to the extent possible, but made clear that the U.S. would respond to any Russian pressure tactics. He urged the GOF to adopt a similar, reasonable but firm approach during its upcoming February 16 meeting with First DFM Karasin and the February 22 annual meeting in Moscow of foreign and defense ministers. Bryza told Terral that Saakashvili intended to take a moderate approach on UNOMIG renewal, and suggested that Azerbaijan's recent willingness to demonstrate its energy independence may also be playing a role in persuading the Russians to shift to a more careful approach to the Caucasus. In response to Terral's question about Russian sincerity in facilitating a settlement on Nagorno-Karabakh, Bryza suggested that Lavrov's active participation in recent meetings suggested that positive Russian motives should not be excluded a priori. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) EUR DAS Matt Bryza met February 14 with MFA A/S-equivalent for Eastern Europe and Central Asia Jean-Francois Terral to discuss next steps on Georgia/Abkhazia in the wake of the February 12-13 Friends' discussion in Geneva. Terral had not yet seen a full report of the meeting but commented that it appeared to have gone surprisingly well, given Russia's increasingly hard-line positions on any number of other issues (including Putin's recent remarks at Wehrkunde). Bryza agreed that there had been a positive shift in Russian attitudes on Abkhazia, at a minimum as a tactical matter. FM Lavrov himself had assured him that Russia was now interested in seeking improved relations with Georgia.

[1](#)3. (C) Terral agreed it was difficult to distinguish between

Russian strategy and tactics. But calling the Russian stance on Kosovo key, he argued for maintaining "the right temperature" in the Caucasus in view of "the long road ahead" on Kosovo. Although France would remain "the champion of dialogue with Russia," including Georgia/Abkhazia, considerations of "time management" -- Terral noted that he personally spent 30 percent of his time working on Kosovo -- argued for putting Caucasus issues on the back burner for a while. Such an approach should not be equated with surrender or acquiescence; but it would be prudent to try to avoid difficulties on these issues for the next 3-4 months. Terral then explained that Russian First DFM Karasin would visit Paris February 19 and Moscow would host the annual meeting of Russian and French foreign and defense ministers February 22; he expected that both meetings would be dominated by Kosovo. Terral assured Bryza that France would not change its position on Kosovo and that it would resist "intellectually dishonest" Russian attempts -- he cited Russian Security Council Chairman Igor Ivanov's recent visit to Paris, see ref B -- to attempt linkages between Kosovo and the Caucasus. At the same time, even if the GOF would continue to argue that Kosovo was unique and not a precedent (he declared that Russia did not care a whit about Kosovo and described the Russian position as entirely directed against the U.S.), he repeated that France perceived a need to reduce the temperature on Georgia/Abkhazia.

14. (C) Bryza responded that, even if the U.S. did not share Terral's concerns about time management per se, the U.S. did share its wish not to see any renewed flare-ups in the Caucasus. Currently, he judged, things were moving in the right direction: the Friends were working to breathe life into existing mechanisms for Abkhazia; the Georgians were going along; the results of the recent meeting in Geneva were quite positive; and in Geneva the Abkhaz had not called into question Georgia's right to be present in the Upper Kodori Valley, despite other criticisms of the Georgian government. But reducing the temperature should not be viewed as willingness to give in; he cited the recent decision by Azerbaijan not to purchase any Russian gas as an example of quiet firmness that had sent shock waves through Russia and may have played a role in persuading the Russians to pursue, at least for the moment, a softer line on Georgia.

15. (C) Terral hoped that the next round of discussions on UNOMIG renewal would prove less contentious than the last one, arguing that it would be important to reduce to the maximum extent possible clashes with the Russians in order to increase the chances of success on Kosovo, given that the UNOMIG mandate would be up for renewal before consideration of any UNSCR on Kosovo. Bryza responded that the U.S. generally agreed on the desirability of keeping the Caucasus quiet, and ideally would welcome a purely technical rollover of the UNOMIG mandate. He added that the Georgians also appeared interested in a reasonable approach to mandate renewal and recounted how, at U.S. urging, Saakashvili had dropped an initial proposal for language criticizing the recent elections in Abkhazia. Saakashvili was insisting now only on language referring to IDP right of return to Gali, which had already featured in earlier resolutions. But Bryza emphasized again that the U.S. approach would depend to a large degree on the extent to which the Russians were prepared to adopt a similar approach. The U.S. would not allow the Russians to bulldoze others, and would be prepared to counter Russian demands with its own proposals if necessary.

16. (C) Terral professed to have been impressed by the quality of recent discussions between Azerbaijani President Aliyev and President Chirac. Aliyev had taken a firm line on resisting Russian pressure and had insisted on Azerbaijan's full independence, including with respect to gas and oil. It was more difficult, he said, to assess Aliyev's position on Nagorno-Karabakh; for the moment he could afford to sit back and portray Kocharian as the main obstacle to a settlement. Terral solicited Bryza's judgment as to whether Russia was truly committed to working toward a settlement or was playing a duplicitous game. Bryza said he had no way of knowing for

certain; at the same time, it was difficult to dismiss as pure theatrics FM Lavrov's recent willingness to spend two hours brain-storming with the Minsk Group chairmen.

17. (U) This message has been cleared by DAS Bryza.

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